

Status Report

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November 1992

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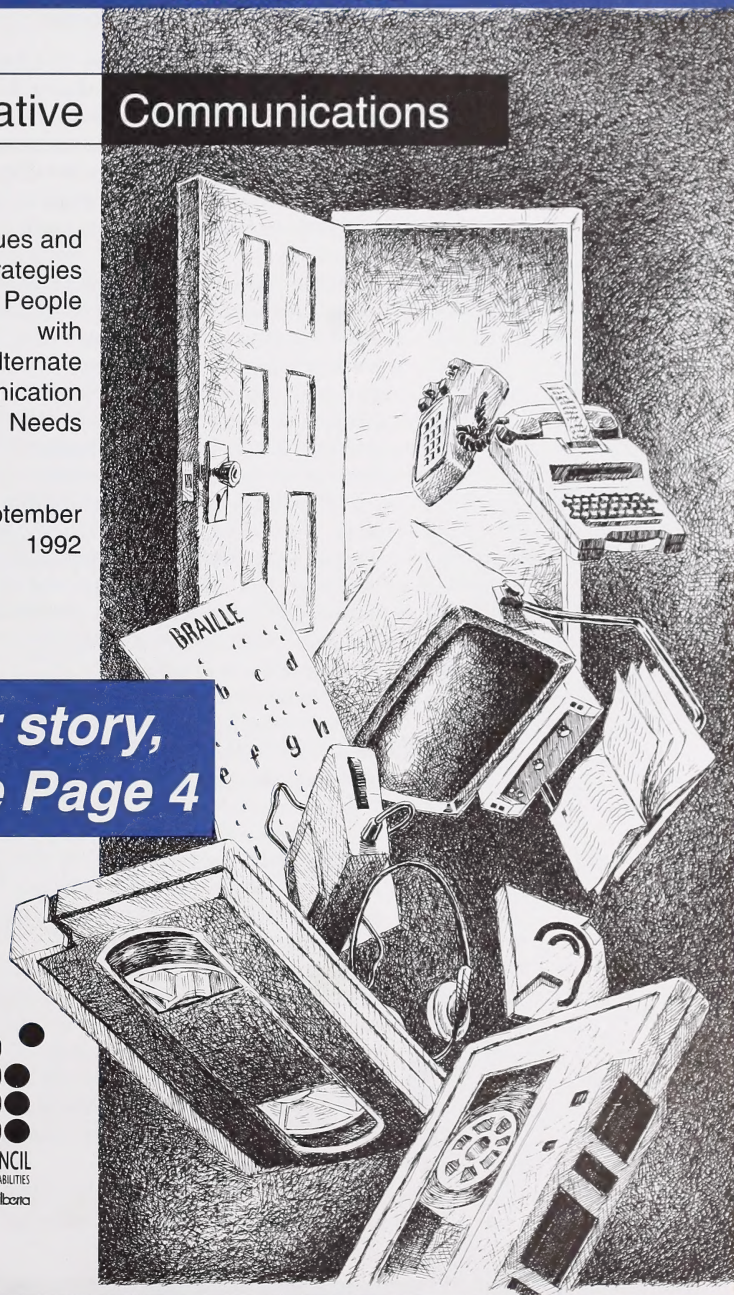
Alternative

Communications

Issues and
Strategies
for People
with
Alternate
Communication
Needs

September
1992

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Message from the Chair

The Winds of Change

by Gary McPherson, Chairperson

Fall is well upon us, and despite the vibrant colours and smells it brings, it signals the coming of snow and an unforgiving chill. But from my perspective, unlike the annual deep freeze our weather is about to bring, the political climate this fall is about to shift to one of rare warmth, optimism, and opportunity.

By the time this newsletter is published, the national referendum on the constitution will have come and gone. Whatever the result, it should allow this country and, in particular, this province to go back to the business of maintaining and improving the quality of life for its citizens. In Alberta, there are further ramifications of the constitutional debate finally coming to a close. The Honourable Don Getty, who has done an admirable job of tackling an impossible task - that of ensuring that Alberta and the West have an equitable say in matters of national importance - is stepping down as Premier.

In the coming months, a new leader for the Progressive Conservative party will be chosen. At the time of writing, six members of cabinet had stepped forward to announce their candidacy: Nancy Betkowski, Ralph Klein, Elaine McCoy, Rick Orman, John Oldring, and Doug Main. That list will almost certainly be expanded. Whoever is successful will automatically become the most influential person in Alberta.

That person will not have a long period of time to demonstrate his/her leadership capabilities to voting Albertans. The ruling party is obligated to call a provincial election - which could be as early as the spring of 1993. At that point, Albertans will go to the polls to decide who they want as leader.

All this means a great deal for Albertans

with a disability. Do not underestimate your power to be heard in these political processes. Do not underestimate your ability to matter in a leadership race, or, more importantly, an election. Keep this very important figure in mind: by the latest tally (1991 HALS), we numbered 424,595 strong.

Yes, only members of the PC party will directly decide who will be the next leader of this province, but each candidate's views can be tested, even if you're not a member of the party. You can attend public forums. You can write letters questioning a candidate's position on issues of disability. In short, you can make each candidate aware of your existence and needs. And if you really want to drive the car, you can become a member of the party and take part in the vote.

The only difference between the PC leadership review and the next provincial election will be size. Parties and candidates will, of course, have to be even more publicly accountable with their opinions and platforms.

The keys to being heard in either political process are sound planning and maintaining a rational voice. Ranting and raving will only serve to alienate you from other voters. The voice of reason will bring other individuals and groups on your side. The best chance of having a government respect Albertans with disabilities and tackle issues important to them is to make prospective candidates realize how significant and united we are.

Truly, the winds of change have begun to blow. The window of opportunity is open, but caution - it won't be for long. Will the winds blow in our favour? It's up to us to decide. ■

Status Report

Editor: Cliff Bridges
Asst. Editor: Wendy Buckley

Status Report is published quarterly by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and is intended to provoke discussion about issues facing persons with disabilities. **This publication is also available on audio cassette** by contacting our office at:

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We welcome comments and suggestions from our readers at any time. Please address your correspondence to: The Editor, *Status Report*, at the above address.

The ideas and opinions expressed in *Status Report* are those of their authors and are not necessarily those held by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.



The Cost of Unemployment

*Editors Note: the following article is reprinted with permission from **Creative Employment Options** published by B.C.-based Neil Squire Foundation, a Canadian non-profit organization responsive to the needs of people with severe physical disabilities. The figures in this article are in today's dollars and don't take into consideration cost of living increases; some of the programs mentioned are exclusive to B.C..*

In June of 1990 "Ruby" decided to become a participant in Creative Employment Options. For 27 years her horizons have been at chair level. Home is the extended care wing of a rehabilitation centre (paid for by Social Services).

Ruby is excited to be doing something assertive with her life, but also apprehensive. Questions around stamina, ability, and confidence play in her mind as

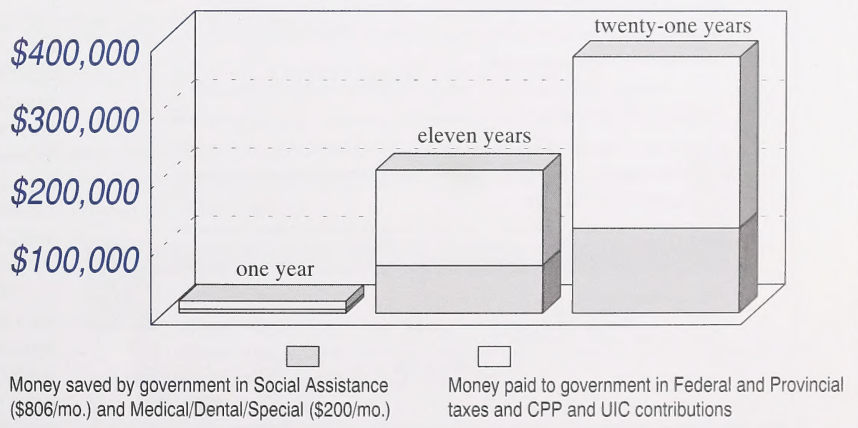
she wonders if the \$80 she receives each month (from Social Services) for "extras" will be enough to facilitate this challenge. As she boards the handidart bus, silent thanks are given for the new glasses (compliments of the Supplementary Health Program) that bring her eyesight to normal.

Today "Ruby" is working full-time at a job that she "totally enjoys" and anticipates a long, full career path. For the first time in her life she is earning a disposable income, paying taxes, paying for her share of accommodation and meals, and is on a benefit program. Her health is excellent and she has been working on getting herself out of the extended care centre and into an independent living centre.

"Ruby" typifies the goals of the Creative Employment Options program, which are to create an environment that leads to meaningful paid employment for persons with severe physical disabilities. ■

Cost Savings to Government

When people with disabilities find employment (a case study of 'Ruby')





Executive Director's Message

Alternative Communications

by Eric Boyd, Executive Director

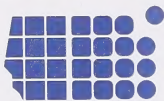
Access to government information - most Albertans take it for granted, myself included. But for many, it's not that easy. Some 114,000 Albertans (1986 HALS) have visual and hearing disabilities and often require information in alternate formats. Many more with learning disabilities have similar needs. The problem is that other formats are rarely made available.

Consider, if you will, the plight of a deaf

person. While most of us can phone a government office and obtain some degree of success with our request, a deaf person is forced to use a special operator to translate written text from a TDD (Telephone Device for the Deaf) into spoken language and vice versa. Not only is there a lack of privacy, the method is time consuming as well. That same person is also unable to take part in a government meeting or forum because there's no sign language interpreter available. Also consider the blind person who needs a brochure on government programs. This person will be forced to ask someone to read the information to them because a Braille or audio tape version isn't available.

When the Premier's Council unveiled the Action Plan in 1990, we realized there were some disability-specific areas it didn't cover, including alternate communications. In the fall of 1991, we set out to address this issue. A task force of eleven individuals representing community organizations and government was established. This group, led by our Director of Research and Policy Review, Dr. Fran Vargo, worked well into 1992 to develop a draft document. In turn, this document was taken to public forums in Edmonton and Calgary for a consultation process. Input was provided by some 48 organizations, municipalities and corporations in this consultation stage. Where realistic, such input was worked back into the document. The result is ***Alternative Communications: Strategies and Issues for People with Alternate Communication Needs***.

We know ***Alternative Communications*** isn't perfect. But we feel it is an excellent framework for change. It outlines inadequacies in five areas: access to government information, access to the justice system, access to educational



THE PREMIER'S COUNCIL
ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
Alberta

Gary McPherson
Chairperson
Eric Boyd
Executive Director

Rick Hansen
Honorary Chairperson

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release - Monday, September 28, 1992

CALGARY - A new report challenges the Alberta Government to recognize the unique communication needs of people who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or who have any other disability that requires an alternate form of communication. ***Alternative Communications***, produced by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities with direct input from consumers, also contains specific recommendations to help government develop policies to improve communications with people who require information in an alternate format such as Braille documents and sign language interpretation.

According to the latest information available from Statistics Canada, over 114,000 adult Albertans have either a seeing, hearing, or speaking disability which may require a communication method different from that used by the general population. Many more have learning disabilities which also require alternate forms of communication. Yet the Alberta Government has no policies to address the needs of these individuals when it comes to accessing government documents or meetings, the justice system, or educational resources. ***Alternative Communications*** highlights inadequacies in these areas, and recommends policy solutions to each problem.

"While the government has made great strides in removing physical barriers from buildings and washrooms, communication barriers preventing access to information and services are still very real," says Premier's Council Chairperson Gary McPherson. "People with alternate communication needs still have to rely on friends and family to fill out documents, read information, or interpret spoken words. These methods are unacceptable in this day and age."

McPherson is calling on the Alberta Government to endorse ***Alternative Communications*** and to implement its recommendations as soon as possible.

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The September 28 news release announcing ***Alternative Communications***.



resources, access to sign language interpreters, and access to communication technology. It then makes specific recommendations for change in each area. The recommendations are not complex. For instance, we feel all government offices should have TDDs. We believe documents should be available in Braille or audio tape. We believe that FM assistive listening systems for hard of hearing people should be available at public meetings.

On the week ending September 27,

1992, we presented all MLAs, ministers, and deputy ministers with a copy of this document. The following Monday, we held a successful press conference in Calgary to publicly announce the document.

You may have seen stories

on *Alternative Communications* on CBC's Alberta Newsday, or your local network.

What will become of this document now that it's been released? It's no secret that many of these reports get archived and are never seen again. We hope this does not happen with *Alternative Communications*. But in large part, that depends on the people that are directly affected by the report. As Gary McPherson outlined in his column, the political climate couldn't be better for the report's recommendations to be implemented. Candidates for the PC leadership and for the following provincial election should be well aware of this document's existence. It's up to the public to make them realize how important it is.

Ironically, the week before we revealed the final version of *Alternative Communications*, the Royal Bank of Canada announced they would make account statements available in Braille. In essence, private industry is breaking the trail for government. By embracing this document, our government will have the opportunity to truly share a leadership role in this very important area. ■

To receive a copy of Alternative Communications, contact the Premier's Council. Document available in large print, Braille, audio-cassette or computer disk.



Premier's Council Executive Director Eric Boyd answers media's questions about *Alternative Communications*.

Facts and Figures: Support for Community Living

When asked in a recent survey if it was better for people with disabilities to live in institutions, 74.8% of Albertans disagreed while only 13.2% agreed.

When Albertans were asked if it was better for people with disabilities to live in their home with government assistance, 82.4% agreed, while 7.2% disagreed.



source: 1992 Alberta Survey



What's New In Employment Equity?

by Dr. Fran Vargo, Director of Research and Policy Review

A conference on employment equity, the first of its kind in Alberta, took place September 21 to 23 in Edmonton. By some measures it was a smashing success: 320 registrants; over 60 speakers; participation from employers, three levels of government, unions, community organizations and some designated group members; and a "sold out" trade show.

Innovative programs, partnership arrangements and implementation strategies were presented by the banks, major oil companies, the Cities of Calgary and Edmonton, AGT, the Universities of Alberta and Calgary, and numerous others in a busy round of workshops and plenary sessions. People from each of the groups designated under the Act (women, visible minorities, aboriginal people and those with disabilities) had ample opportunity to educate participants about the barriers still faced by their members and some solutions for removal of those barriers.

The banks were there in abundance with good news. This is one group included under the Employment Equity Act that really seems to have taken the mandate seriously, after what seemed like a slow start in the early years. Syncrude, a company that voluntarily participates in employment equity, has also developed some clever approaches to the transition of women from the pink ghetto to non-traditional jobs, and to the employment of native people.

The labour movement, a relatively new player in employment equity, sent union representatives to present two workshops: Collective Bargaining Issues and Organized Labour Programs for Equity. While there are still many issues to be resolved regarding employment equity and collective bargaining, it was gratifying to see that at least the players are all gathering around

the same table.

After two and a half days of listening and discussing, here are some impressions of where we are.

● **There is a gap between perceived and actual change.** A presenter from the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) stated that he hears very little about "reverse discrimination" any more. This accusation is usually made by white males who perceive that their status as favoured employees is eroding. It may not be something that CHRC hears about much, but the question was raised over and over again in workshops: how do you respond to people who claim reverse discrimination in hiring and promotions?

One conference participant expressed her frustration this way: the use of the very term "discrimination" suggests that individuals realize that this is what has gone on in the past. Calling the present situation "reverse" discrimination, and trying to fight it, says that what went on before was OK, but any efforts to redress the situation are not OK.

● **There is still a great reluctance to make "accommodations" for designated group members in the workplace.** We are all accommodated at work in some way, be it the freedom to juggle work schedules, an occasional long lunch break or subsidized parking. Many of these "accommodations" are implemented to attract and retain scarce workers in some skill occupations. Others, like parking, are given in lieu of other transportation options.

The difference between these accommodations and those required by some people in the target groups has more to do with the value we place on those individuals than on the accommodation

"Calling the present situation 'reverse' discrimination, and trying to fight it, says that what went on before was OK, but any efforts to redress the situation are not OK."



requested. Employees, it seems, must prove their value before a situation can be created to ensure that they can show their worth. How unfortunate that a first rate employee may be lost for want of some flexibility.

● **People with disabilities continue to represent the greatest challenge to employment equity.** There is greater diversity within this group than any other, and at least half of this group is doubly disadvantaged by also being female. Indeed, while the fact of being disabled may be the key one initially, that in combination with membership in one or more of the other designated groups can be fatal to employment status.

Many severely disabled individuals are successfully employed, as are even greater numbers of people with mild and moderate disabilities. However, males are employed at a greater rate than females, and tend to earn equivalent salaries to their non-disabled counterparts while employed disabled females lag behind their non-disabled counterparts. Within this diverse group, it appears the old hierarchal standards are also a factor in employment.

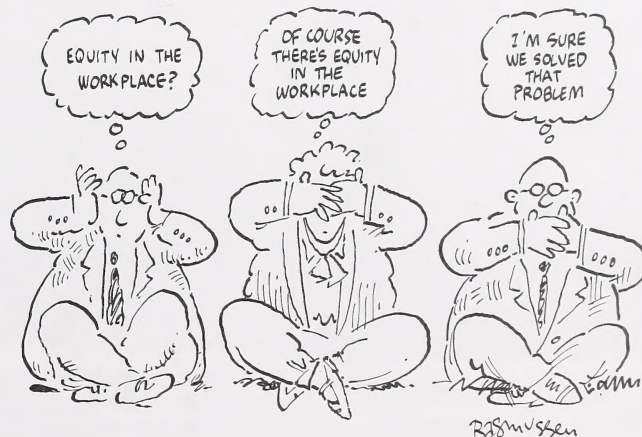
● **The already shaky marriage between training and employment may be headed for divorce.** Good educational preparation for employment has never been more

important than it is now, but neither has there ever been more haggling about who should provide training opportunities.

Changes to Unemployment Insurance to divert dollars to retraining have upset representatives of groups that have not typically been in employment because their members cannot qualify for this training. It is reported that employers in Canada lag far behind their Asian or European counterparts in providing training and upgrading for employees. And the proposed Constitutional Agreement would allow provinces to take responsibility for job training, thereby threatening any coordination between employment equity (federal) and job training (provincial) initiatives. Someone needs to grab this ball and run with it.

Conference participants may have represented the converted in this change process, but many of them clearly had to go back and work with others who are not yet converted. While there is evidence of movement all around, the question remains whether change will occur fast enough to catch up with the other demographic changes that will be upon us by the year 2000 and beyond.

It is seven years since the Employment Equity Act was first implemented. Will another seven years be enough to see equity achieved? ■





The Barrier Free Home

An Edmonton Couple Redefines Accessibility

by Cliff Bridges, Council Communications

"Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam, be it ever so humble, there's no place like home," once wrote noted American actor John Howard Payne. According to Doug and Marnie Bovee, humble is fine. But what's wrong with throwing in a little pleasure and, more importantly, practicality?

Home for the Bovees is a 17th floor, 1900 square foot condominium that overlooks the North Saskatchewan River and, across the valley, downtown Edmonton. It is, by any standard, a beautiful home - the fine furnishings, tasteful decorating, and panoramic views all attest to that. But it's when you get beyond

first impressions and look at the detail that you begin to realize how the Bovees have created an environment that is perfectly suited for two people who use wheelchairs.

It's no accident that these two long-time Edmonton residents have ended up in what could be the perfect barrier free home. It began when they agreed to purchase what was essentially an empty concrete shell in a newly constructed Saskatchewan Drive high-rise. The developer, who Marnie describes as "very accommodating", had no problem letting the couple design their own living space.

The next step was

an incredibly thorough planning process. "We went through every square inch of space - what it was going to be used for; what kind of material it was going to be," says Doug. "It really stepped away from what most people want, which is instant gratification - 'oh god, gotta have a new house' - and they go slam it together in three months and spend the rest of their lives making modifications to it."

Doug's background as an artist (much of his work adorns the walls) and draftsman came very much into play during the planning. Sheaves of blueprints and a year and a half later, the couple was ready to start construction.

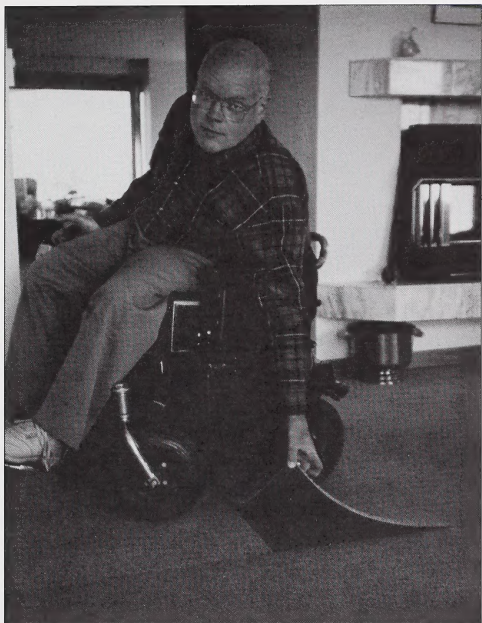
Doug's involvement didn't stop there. Wanting to keep his hands firmly on the project, he essentially became the general contractor. In October of 1991 - six months after construction started - the Bovees moved into their dream home.

The first thing you notice when you walk through the door is how spacious it is. Considering that 1900 square feet was divided into three main rooms, the spaciousness isn't hard to understand. There is, of course, a practical side to such wide open spaces: electric wheelchairs can access all parts of this home without colliding with the usual obstacle course you'll find in most retrofitted homes.

Also immediately noticeable is the amount of cabinets. There are custom built cabinets everywhere. In fact, the cabinet maker who built them told the Bovees that their home contains about four times the amount of cabinets in an ordinary home. There are several reasons for this. People who use wheelchairs need a lot of cabinet space at lower levels, and the higher levels are seldom used. Also, everything the Bovees use - whether kitchen appliances, stereo, VCR, computer - is concealed in a



The Bovee kitchen features under-sink cabinets which pull out for dish washing.



Doug demonstrates how easily the carpet tiles can be lifted and replaced in high traffic areas should they get worn.

cabinet when not in use. And any special modifications are concealed by cabinets as well. "I believe that things must look as normal as possible, and modifications shouldn't have this 'crip' look," says Doug. "It has to be functional, but it also has to be esthetically pleasing."

The best example of this is in the large room that contains the kitchen, dining area, and Doug's work center. The kitchen cabinets are a wheelchair user's dream. The bottom cabinets - the most useable ones for the Bovees - are all drawers which slide out with ease. The Bovees' most used items occupy the most sensible cupboard space. For instance,

everyday dishes are kept in the drawer beside the dishwasher, making for easy transfers.

As for the countertops, they are lowered only an inch and a quarter, unlike the three inch drop that some adapted kitchens often have. The Bovees explain they did this to make the home attractive to able-bodied people should they ever decide to sell it. "Besides, that inch and a quarter makes all the difference to us," says Marnie.

Another excellent feature in the kitchen is the cabinets under the sink. They roll out to accommodate a wheelchair for washing dishes. Once they are rolled back in, it's almost impossible to distinguish them from the rest of the cabinets. Add a number of other features, like a moveable island, a multitude of power bars, and smooth surfaces for easy cleaning, and you've got an extremely accessible kitchen.

At the other end of the room is Doug's work area. Here, the computer, drafting, and painting equipment is tucked away in cabinets. A sink for painting is accessed by removing the same roll out cabinets found in the kitchen. A few feet away is a guest bathroom, fully equipped with a wheel-in shower and strategically located grab bars.

Just around the corner is the living room. Here again is a multitude of easily accessed cabinets. The entire area is wide open: a wheelchair user would be hard-pressed to find a collision here. Just off the living room is the circular balcony, which connects to the bedroom. The unique thing here is the heating system. Unlike most high-rise buildings which use floor radiators preventing wheelchair access to the balcony, the Bovees' building uses a ceiling-based heating system. The result is a balcony that becomes an important living space.

The final room is the bedroom, and it is truly a study in accessibility. Again, the cabinets are designed to take complete advantage of the lower areas. There are also a host of small, practical touches, like bedside cabinets designed specifically to accommodate wheelchair battery chargers.



The Bovee bathroom is completely accessible. At right is the shower with benches below; at left is the Jacuzzi tub and lift system above it.



But without a doubt, the most impressive area is the ensuite bathroom.

Here you'll find a large wheel-in shower facility, complete with benches. Forget to bring your towel? No problem - the towels are stored in a cabinet under the benches. Beside the shower is a large Jacuzzi-style bathtub. Doug is unable to access the tub unassisted, but he's solved that problem by installing a lift system that slides along a rail attached to the ceiling. The entire

system stores neatly away in an inconspicuous cabinet. Add a remote control fireplace and you've got a bathroom that's not only practical, it's luxurious.

There are many other features of the Bovees' home worth mentioning, such as the carpet. It's no secret that wheelchairs are hard on carpet, especially electric chairs. The Bovees solved that problem by installing an industrial grade of carpet tiles in all areas except the kitchen and bathrooms. The tiles, which are a warm neutral shade, can be easily pulled up and replaced should they

get worn out in high traffic areas. Another feature is the audio/video system. Every room has surround sound speakers, and its own remote control. There's also an intercom system between different areas of the home, not to mention a video display to see who's at the front door. And then there are the small touches, including extra-wide doors, lowered light switches, and closets with lowered hanger bars and shelves.

When you add up all of the features, you'll find a home that is unquestionably ahead of its time in terms of accessibility. But according to Doug, the home builders will catch up. "I think the construction industry has been picking up their ears and saying 'maybe we should be doing a little more customization.' They've suddenly become aware that there's this silver wave of people coming at them, and they're the ones with the money." "The architects are realizing that it's cost efficient to plan ahead," adds Marne. "Retrofitting is expensive and frustrating."

The Bovees are somewhat self-conscious about living in such comfortable surroundings, and are reluctant to give the impression that all people with disabilities can afford to live in such a barrier free environment. But the reality is that they've only been able to buy their dream home after years of hard work. "We've made big sacrifices for this," explains Marne. "There's a big price tag, and a big financial commitment we have to honour monthly."

After seeing how comfortable the Bovees are in their home, it's obvious that such sacrifices are well worth it. ■



The Bovees at home in their kitchen: "It has to be functional, but it also has to be esthetically pleasing".

Royal Bank Leads Way for Blind

While the Alberta government does not yet have an alternative communications policy, the Royal Bank appears to be forging ahead with their own. In September, the bank announced that their visually impaired customers can now receive monthly chequing account statements in Braille.

Customers who want the service, which is available in English or French, simply have to contact their local branch. They'll receive the Braille statements at no extra cost. The CNIB, which helped develop the program, hopes that other banks will soon follow the Royal's lead. ■



More Accessible Transportation



S.C.A.T. Advisory Council Member Anne Belohorec and S.C.A.T. driver Barry Getschel try out the new bus.

The County of Strathcona, which includes the city of Sherwood Park just east of Edmonton, has a new accessible transit system.

In a ceremony on September 22nd, the county unveiled S.C.A.T., or Strathcona County Accessible Transportation. Presenters at the ceremony included Peter Elzinga, Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Premier's Council Executive Director Eric Boyd, and Strathcona County Reeve Iris Evans.

The system consists of two low floor mini-bus vehicles with

retractable ramps for wheelchair users. One vehicle is dedicated to an hourly community route, the other is available for door to door service in Sherwood Park, the rest of the county, and trips to and from Edmonton. Cost ranges from \$1.00 to \$4.00 depending on whether door to door service is required. As well, two hours advance notice is required for door to door trips. The only drawback to the service is that it's only offered during day-time hours Monday to Friday.

For more information, contact Strathcona County Accessible Transit at 464-1919. ■

New Adult Support Program

For many people, nursing homes represent the end of the road - the last stop for seniors and persons with disabilities. While caring for these people is still an important priority, an Edmonton continuing care organization is pioneering an innovative new program to allow people to remain in the community.

The Capital Care Group, a publicly funded organization which operates Norwood, Lynnwood, Grandview and Dickinsfield continuing care centres, recently received approval from Alberta Health to start a fifteen space Young Adult Day Support Program at the Young Adult Unit in Capital Care Dickinsfield. The program is scheduled to start in the new year.

The first of its kind in Alberta, the Young Adult Day Support Program is designed to assist people 18 to 55 years to live independently in the community. If needed, participants will receive assistance with medical needs and personal care,

including hygiene and nutrition. The skill development portion of the program will focus on personal money management, cooking, and shopping. Recreation and social opportunities are also important components of the program.

In conjunction with the new programming, the Young Adult Unit will be providing respite and part-time placement. This means that participants can stay at Capital Care Dickinsfield for a few days so that home caregivers can have a break.

According to Capital Care Group President Sheila Weatherill, the program is made possible through the reallocation of funds from the closure of nine full-time beds on the Centre's Young Adult Unit. "By closing nine full-time beds, the Centre will be able to provide services for 30 to 40 young adults in the Day Support Program," says Weatherill. "Since these services assist people to live in the community, they ultimately reduce the need for full-time beds for young adults." ■



Council Activity Update

Bill 25:

The Michener Centre Act

The Premier's Council is still in the process of attempting to convince government to abandon Bill 25, which would see Red Deer's Michener Centre turned over to a community based board of directors. The Council is concerned that such a board could adopt a mandate of self preservation and attempt to enlarge Michener's population in the process. This, of course, flies directly in the face of recommendations made by a majority of stakeholders in Alberta.

At a recent Council meeting in Edmonton, Council Members directed the Council Secretariat to once again send letters of protest to all MLAs.

Canada Clause

The Premier's Council has written several letters of protest regarding the omission of people with disabilities from the Canada Clause of the Constitution.

At the time of writing, Constitutional Affairs Minister Joe Clark had indicated publicly his support to reinclude people with in the legal text. Most provinces, including Alberta, also appear to support this. But while an agreement in principle was

expected to be reached, the actual addition was not expected to take place until a First Minister's Meeting after the referendum.

Community Supports Program

Community Supports is a proposal calling for the consolidation of the 22 government programs that currently supply supports to persons with disabilities into one locally available program. If your organization would be interested in learning more about this program, we would be happy to make a personal presentation, or supply you with a captioned, stand alone video.

A number of large provincial organizations and provincial chapters of national organizations have formed a coalition to generate support for the Community Supports Program. The coalition is beginning to carry out a campaign strategy to have government accept the recommendation. For more information about the coalition, contact: Phil Stephan, Chairman, Alberta Coalition for Community Supports, c/o Red Deer Association for the Mentally Handicapped, 6010 - 45 Avenue, Red Deer, Alberta T4N 3M4 telephone 343-1933. ■

Food for Thought

"If you've got a positive attitude, there is no such thing as a level that you cannot reach. It is there. All you must do is walk up the ladder. See I don't believe in negativity. I will not allow it around me. If I see it I will call people on it. There's only one "have to" in life; to die, everything else is choice."

Karl Hilzinger 1932-1988



The Mailbag

August 28, 1992

Dear Mr. McPherson:

I have received your *Status Report* and it was very nice to have received it. I am fine and I hope that this letter finds you feeling the same way. I used to live in Red Deer. I went there on October 29, 1965 and I must say that I hope that Michener Centre will close and soon. It would be very nice to see more disabled people move closer to their family. I was born here in Lac La Biche on November 11, 1950. I have three sisters and two brothers. They are all married now.

Is there any disabled people who would like to take a course? Well, if you would like to then please write to me. I hope that many people will write me. I hope that many more disabled people will take a course this year. I'm 41, and you're never too old to learn.

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Your letters to the editor are welcome. While the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities retains the right to edit any published letters for length, every effort will be made to preserve the original intent of the letter.

Editor's Note: Michener Centre and the debate over Bill 25 continues to be a hot topic. Here's a sample of some of the letters about Michener Centre we received in the past couple of months.

August 14, 1992

Letter to the Editor:

I am a single parent with two dependent mentally handicapped sons. We live, as a family, in the community. You may applaud this and say it was the "right" and "good" choice but I would like to give you a few insights into community living that you won't find in research papers.

I chose to keep my family together in the community but that does not give me the right to demand that same choice of others. If I had known how insurmountable some of the problems were going to be, I might have seriously looked at Michener Centre as an option.

No one told me I would have to fight and claw and scream for absolutely any service I got. No one told me I would have to spend thousands of dollars taking my children to assessment centres. No one told me I would have to give up a lifestyle to meet all the needs of sons and no one told me it never ends!

Why are you so deathly afraid of Bill 25? In the article Mr. Bridges states "such a board could actively recruit new residents in order to survive." That is exactly what community based agencies in Red Deer are doing to Michener Centre now. What's the difference?

If the concept of Michener Centre is meant to die, it will. Why do you people have to pursue it with such a "Holy Quest" attitude that it makes life so fragile if we stand in the way of your "Holy Mission"?

Lily Breland
Red Deer, Alberta



Accessible Parks in Alberta

The gears of change are grinding away in Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation. The department has developed a program to

promote barrier free access in provincial parks and recreation areas.

The Alberta Parks Service currently has 90 day-use areas and 65 campgrounds offering some level of barrier free access. In addition, a number of provincial parks and recreation

areas also provide barrier free access to fishing, group-use areas, visitor centres and amphitheatres.

New buildings and structures in provincial parks and recreations are constructed according to standards developed by Alberta Labour. Parks and recreation areas offering improved barrier free facilities will be identified through symbols on new highway signs which will be phased in over the next few years. Eye-catching blue reflective signs will replace the old brown Parks and Recreation highway signs.

Parks staff are in the process of preparing a *Wheelchair Access Guide*, which will be ready in time for the 1993 camping season. For more information on specific sites and assistance with your travel plans, call Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation Vacation Planning Counsellors at 1-800-661-8888 (toll free). ■



Alberta parks and historic sites: becoming increasingly accessible.

Edmonton Leads Way

The City of Edmonton is taking some huge leaps in an effort to become accessible. In September, Edmonton Transit announced it will begin replacing its aging bus fleet with units designed to be wheelchair accessible in the spring of 1993.

Edmonton will buy 59 low-floor buses over the next two years, in the process becoming the first Canadian city to have a large number of these vehicles. The buses, which are similar to the one being operated as a pilot project between the cities of Edmonton and St. Albert, have no steps, and can be lowered so the entrance matches the height of the sidewalk.

On another front, city council passed a

new Accessibility Policy at an August 25th meeting. The policy is comprehensive, and is intended to ensure that over time, city owned and occupied buildings are safely useable for and provide reasonable access for all persons with disabilities, including current and prospective employees, as well as visitors.

According to Mark Kolke, Chair of the City Property Accessibility Committee which produced the policy, it "represents a strong commitment by the City of Edmonton to make its facilities accessible."

Hello, Calgary and Red Deer. Hello? Anyone there? ■



Upcoming Events

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada presents Multiple Sclerosis and Psycho-Social Issues. December 4, 1992, at the Capri Centre in Red Deer. Theme: A workshop for health professionals who work with people with MS. Contact: Joanne Seefried at 346-0290 or Shirley McFall at 471-3313.

SKILLS Training and Support Services presents Sexuality: Changing Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour, and Sexual Abuse: Victimizability. November 9 and 10, 1992, at the Fantasyland Hotel, West Edmonton Mall. Theme: two 1 day seminars on issues of sexuality affecting persons with mental disabilities. Contact: SKILLS Training and Support Services Association, 705 Guardian Building, 10240 - 124 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5N 3W6 Telephone: 496-9686.

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario presents "I Have the Right!" Invisible No Longer. April 28 to May 1, 1993, Toronto, Ontario. Theme: discussion of a wide range of issues affecting people with learning disabilities. Contact: Mary-Gayle Goebel at (416) 487-4106.

The Wild Rose Foundation presents Vitalize 93 - Provincial Volunteer Conference. June 10 to 12, 1993, at the Calgary Convention Center. Theme: a province wide conference to assist Alberta's volunteer sector in their development needs. Contact: Laurie Brooks at 422-9305 (toll free through R.I.T.E.)

Office des Personnes Handicapees du Quebec presents an international scientific symposium. November 18 to 20, 1992, at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal. Theme: Sharing Ten Years of Research on disability, rehabilitation and social integration. Contact: Suzanne Dore, OPHQ, (819) 477-7100.

The Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled and the United States Council for International Rehabilitation present Partners for Independence: Models that Work. October 27 to 29, 1993 at Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Theme: to showcase "cutting edge" partnerships that promote the participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of life. A call for abstracts has gone out. For information and official abstract submission forms, contact: Program Coordinator, North American Conference of Rehabilitation International, 45 Sheppard Avenue East, Suite 801, Toronto, Ontario M2N 5W9. ■

Is your association or agency sponsoring a provincial or national conference or workshop? If so, please forward the pertinent information to:

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities
250, 11044 - 82 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 0T2

Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta presents 1992 FCSS Conference. November 26 to 28, 1992, at the Jasper Park Lodge, Jasper, Alberta. Theme: 25 years of FCSS... Changing Times. Contact: FCSSAA, 2nd Floor, 4732 - 91 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T6B 2L1.

Changing Attitudes with Video

CBC's Educational Sales division is currently running a promotion focusing on disability. The promotion, which expires on December 31, features seven videos: Attendant Care, More Than Enough (literacy for the deaf), My Daddy's Ears are Broken, The Vision of the Blind, Learning Disabilities, Natives and Disability, and Take a Chance and Learn (children with multiple disabilities).

All videos can be purchased for \$459. Any three can be bought for \$249, while individual videos are \$99. For more information, contact: CBC Educational Sales, Box 500, Station A, Toronto, Ontario M5W 1E6.

Success For Paralympics

Disabled sports is on the verge of becoming big business, if the recent success of the Barcelona Paralympics is any indication. The eleven days of competition drew some 1.346 million spectators and 46 events were sold out.

The Canadian team placed seventh overall, capturing 75 medals, including 28 gold. The United States led the field with a total of 176 medals.

The Voice Controlled House

Control lights, electric beds, electric doors, appliances, TV's, radios, stereos - using only your voice. The Mastervoice E.C.U. does all this, and can even make phone calls and detect intruders.

The Mastervoice E.C.U. is a computer based electronic home control that works through the existing electrical wiring system in your home. All you need to do is have your lamps and appliances plugged into special modules, which are then plugged into any standard wall outlet in your home. Verbal commands, which are chosen by the user and taught to the system, can be given from as much as twenty feet away.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this product is its use of "macros". A single command, like "guest", could trigger a number of results like a porch light turning on, the drapes closing, and the volume of the stereo turning down. Other features include a built-in speaker phone and infrared alarm system.

For more information, contact Marvel Technologies International Inc., #206, 2723 - 37 Avenue N.E., Calgary, Alberta T1Y 5R8 Telephone 262-7835.

Commonwealth Games Include Disabled

The 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria will set a precedent for disabled sport. Athletes with disabilities will take part in the opening and closing ceremonies. They will also be housed in the athlete's village, awarded specially designed medals, and clothed by the 67 Commonwealth Games associations in their respective national team uniforms.

"This is a significant step in our efforts to attain full and equal recognition for our athletes," said Anne Merklinger, director of the International Paralympic Committee's Commission for the Inclusion of Athletes with a Disability.

Merklinger made the comments after the General Assembly of the Commonwealth Games Federation approved the recommendations in Barcelona on July 22nd of this year.